

VZCZCXYZ0008
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHC #1997 2951718
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 211712Z OCT 08
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0000
INFO ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0000
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0000
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 0000
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0000
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0000
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0000
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0000
RUEHRK/AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK 0000
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0000
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0000
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0000
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0000

UNCLAS STATE 111997

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ENRG](#) [NO](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [KGHG](#) [XT](#) [XG](#)
SUBJECT: NORWAY HOSTS INFORMAL ARCTIC MEETING

REF: COPENHAGEN 321

¶1. (U) Summary: The Norwegian foreign ministry hosted an informal sub-ministerial Arctic meeting, outside the Arctic Council, in Tromso October 13-14. Arctic Council member states, Permanent Participants and state observers were briefed on the influence of non-CO2 drivers in Arctic warming; took stock of progress of the Council's "Snow, Water, Ice, Permafrost in the Arctic" (SWIPA) assessment; heard about Russian plans to table a proposal on emergency preparedness and response in the region; and discussed the role of observers and associated Council reforms to enhance their participation. Denmark signaled its intent, when it takes over as Council chair in April 2009, to seek Council input to the COP-15 climate summit in Copenhagen. No decisions were taken nor concluding statement issued. End Summary.

Background

¶2. (U) This meeting was announced by Foreign Minister Stoere at the May Ilulissat Arctic Ocean Conference (Reftel). At that time it was described as a briefing for the Arctic Council member states and Permanent Participants who were not invited to Ilulissat. Participation in the Arctic Ocean Conference was limited to the five Arctic coastal states (Denmark, Norway, U.S., Russia, Canada) and was for the purpose of demonstrating solidarity in peacefully resolving potentially overlapping extended continental shelf claims.

¶3. (U) Over time, the meeting evolved into an unofficial exchange on climate science developments and Arctic Council structural issues. Although the Ilulissat Declaration was alluded to, it was not explicitly included in the agenda. The Tromso meeting included participation by seven of the eight Arctic Council member states (Canada declined to participate due to its October 14 national election) and only one of the Permanent Participants (the Saami Council). The meeting was hosted and chaired by State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Elisabeth Walaas. OAS DAS David Balton led the U.S. delegation, which included the U.S. Senior Arctic Official (SAO) and Regional Environment Officer (REO).

Short-term, non-CO2 Drivers of Climate Change

¶4. (U) In a session moderated by John Calder of NOAA, Dr. Drew Shindell of NASA/Goddard briefed the group on the state

of the science on short-lived Arctic climate forcers (in contrast to carbon dioxide which is long-lived in the atmosphere). These include black carbon (soot), tropospheric ozone (smog), and methane, which mostly originate outside the Arctic but which contribute to accelerated Arctic warming for various reasons. A series of workshops on this subject, the most recent of which took place in Oslo September 15-16 in conjunction with the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), acknowledge the significant scientific uncertainty but recommended that the Arctic Council consider a political commitment to taking voluntary action to address these gasses and pollutants.

15. (U) The workshop recommendations, to be presented to the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) next month in Kautokeino, include enhancing and expanding networks to monitor short-lived forcers; maximizing methane emission reductions by Arctic nations in the near term (and possibly globally through non-Kyoto programs like Methane-to-Markets); limiting the burning of agricultural residues in springtime (leading up to the sensitive Arctic melt season); and undertaking feasibility studies on how best to address sources of these short-term forcing agents. The group also recommended collaboration with the Executive Body of the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP), with UNEP, and with the International Maritime Organization to limit these pollutants, as well as side events at UNFCCC COP-14 in Poznan and COP-15 in Copenhagen. DAS Balton expressed U.S. interest in reviewing the recommendations with a view toward exploring possibilities for taking early action.

SWIPA Update

16. (U) Norwegian Polar Institute Research Director Kim Holmen said that the Arctic sea ice retreat in 2008 came close to the record-breaking 2007 minimum. The low quality of Arctic Ocean sea ice (consisting of one to two-year cover) presages rapid future melting. Dr. Margareta Johansson of Lund University reported on snow cover and permafrost trends, including uncertainty over the stability of subsea methane hydrates. Rene Forsberg of the Danish National Space Institute reported that the Greenland ice sheet is in dynamic balance, but that the retreat of its outlet glaciers is accelerating. The Iceland SAO remarked that increasing amounts of icebergs that calve from Arctic glaciers are a "ticking time bomb" for shipping, particularly given the increasing number of ships in the Arctic Ocean that are not ice-strengthened such as large cruise ships. The Russian SAO, citing U.S. researchers at the Boulder-based National Snow and Ice Data Center, expressed skepticism that Greenland outlet glacier acceleration posed an imminent threat to global sea levels.

Russians on Search and Rescue

17. (U) Russian SAO Anton Vasiliev said Russia was preparing a formal proposal to create an Arctic emergency preparedness/search and rescue (SAR) system it hoped to present to SAOs at their meeting next month. The idea had been discussed in the EPPR working group and at the Ilulissat conference in May, he noted. A priority would be to create a "safety net" around Arctic oil and gas facilities, nuclear power plants, and population centers (note: apparently only in Russia). The proposal would take several years to implement and would include emergency risk assessments, the siting of response centers, and possible future consideration of an integrated Arctic response system. A public/private partnership would permit mixed financing by enterprises such as Lukoil.

18. Vasiliev said that as chair of the Barents-Euro Arctic Council (BEAC), Russia had invested two million Euros over the past year, holding a September seminar in Dudinka, Russia on eco-system impacts of environmental emergencies (sponsored by Sweden), and an October 1-2 oil spill emergency exercise/simulation in Naryan-Mar at the Lukoil Verandey terminal with participation by nearly all of the Arctic countries (note: the U.S. sent a Coast Guard representative).

He invited other Council members to support the Russian initiative, saying they would be invited to collaborate through observation and exercises with Russian "crisis centers." All delegations welcomed the prospective Russian initiative in general terms, while posing clarifying questions. In doing so, DAS Balton recommended that Russia build upon existing arrangements under the IMO, ICAO, bilateral and multilateral SAR agreements. Sweden suggested that an inventory of existing SAR-related arrangements and authorities be developed. Pressed by Netherlands, the Russian said that while oil and gas was Russia's "natural focus," shipping and tourism could also be included. The Saami Council representative welcomed Russian willingness to provide training to Arctic residents.

Danish Preview Priorities

¶9. (U) Danish MFA Political Director Carsten Damsgaard said Denmark had hosted the May Ilulissat conference of the five Arctic coastal states to prevent tensions from emerging over the extended continental shelf claims process. The meeting had been a great success, he said, in that all parties committed to abide by the existing international legal framework to resolve any overlapping claims. Denmark's likely priorities when it assumes the chair of the Arctic Council in April 2009 would be to protect the fragile Arctic environment and to synthesize the Council's research on Arctic climate trends to help inform and guide policy discussions at the UNFCCC COP-15 meeting in December 2009 in Copenhagen. Sweden, Iceland, Norway and several observers voiced support for the Danish proposal to provide Council inputs to COP-15. (Note: we did not verbally support this and will need to discuss in Washington).

Arctic Council Structural Issues

¶10. (U) Elisabeth Walaas opened the discussion on Arctic Council matters by saying it was convinced the existing legal framework applicable to the Arctic was adequate, but that more work was needed on the implementation side. She also stressed that the Arctic Council must become more responsive to rapidly changing Arctic conditions. Walaas helpfully said that the subject of Arctic Council membership was not on the table, but that the member states should be open to making operational changes within the existing mandate that would facilitate observer participation. The other member states (including Russia) voiced similar commitment to the existing framework. A representative of the Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region called for ministerial-level meetings at least one per year (they are currently held biannually), but that view was not echoed by the member states. Finland suggested that informal policy meetings like this one might be scheduled to alternate with ministerial meetings during off years where observer states could participate on a more level playing field with the Permanent Participants. Norway lauded the performance of the six-year secretariat in Tromso, and urged it be made permanent.

¶11. (U) Norway invited interested Arctic Council observer states to participate freely in the informal meeting and to share information about their Arctic interests and how they could contribute to the sustainable development goals of the Council. Poland, Italy, France, Germany, the U.K. and the Netherlands expressed interest in playing larger roles and advocated for participation in the Council's working groups. France announced it was co-sponsoring a conference on the Arctic in Monaco in November 2008 to promote European interest in Arctic scientific research. Netherlands urged that observers be permitted to participate fully in all Council discussions, pledging that "we know our place and would not abuse the privilege." Norway expressed support for observer participation in working groups and promised to develop recommendations for consideration by the SAOs on the role of observers.

¶12. (U) DAS Balton agreed with the view that the existing framework governing the Arctic (e.g. the law of the sea, various IMO instruments, and other environmental agreements)

were generally adequate, and that we saw no need for a new comprehensive Arctic treaty. He noted, however, that new or strengthened rules might also be needed on certain topics such as search and rescue, shipping and fisheries. He noted that the U.S. believes the Council has been effective within the mandate it has been given. DAS Balton expressed U.S. openness to reviewing the role of observers, and welcomed the interest in observership by new states. He urged that in reviewing the role of observers the Council preserve what currently works well, including the role of Permanent Participants. Balton also reminded other participants of the need for all Arctic governments to facilitate access for scientific research.

Comment

¶13. (SBU) Despite the confusing, and some would say problematic, way in which this meeting came to pass, it was useful in that it provided Arctic Council member states a chance to step back from the exigencies of formal meetings to reflect on new developments in Arctic science and how the overall operation can be improved. It highlighted several opportunities: to engage with our Arctic neighbors on how best to mitigate environmental threats such as non-CO2 forcers of climate change; how to enhance the participation of other states and organizations prepared to contribute to the work of the Council; and how best to address the growing need for search and rescue cooperation in the Arctic. It also highlighted narrower national interests, including Norway's strong desire for a permanent AC Secretariat in Tromsø, Russia's domestic need for help with responding to Arctic emergencies, and the Danish intention to use their Arctic Council chairmanship to enhance the UNFCCC COP-15 meeting they will host in December 2009. Although the observer issue highlighted an area for institutional improvement, calls for radical change were absent.

RICE